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Publishing & Commercial Printing

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To: 2021-2022 Local Government Interim Committee

Hi, I'm Melody Martinsen. I'm a Bynum native who grew up in Teton County. In 1990, my husband, Jeff, and I at the age of 24 bought the Choteau Acantha, and we've been local business owners and employers ever since. (Growing up on the ranch, I was already used to working crazy hours and not earning a whole lot of money.)

Thank you for allowing me to explain why the state's 70-plus weekly newspapers oppose PD12 and PD7.

We think the present system of publishing legal notices in Montana's newspapers is not broken. I'm not saying there aren't certain markets where some tweaks need to be made, but overall the weekly newspapers put the PUBLIC in Montana public notices.

We aren't dinosaurs. We're not going extinct. We have grown in the digital age, bringing news and advertisements to our readers in print, on websites and through social media, reaching more readers than ever before.

When a government agency publishes a legal notice in the Acantha, it appears in print, it goes up on our website, and we upload it to montanapublicnotices.com, a statewide repository of all legal notices published in Montana's newspapers. The Montana Newspaper Association pays for this website at no cost to taxpayers.

While legal notices aren't a big part of the Acantha's revenue, in today's highly competitive climate, every penny helps. That said, the Montana Board of Printing caps the cost of legal notices at \$13 per 100 words for the first publication and \$11 per 100 words for all subsequent publications. In counties where there are two or more newspapers, those rates can fall further as the newspapers competitively bid for the contract. In my county, where there are two newspapers, we bid and received the contract at \$9 and \$8.50 per 100 words. State law requires us to give our lowest rate to the state whenever it sends us legal notices, so this is a bargain for the state as well as the county.

We take the title of "newspaper of record" seriously. We work with school clerks, city finance officers and county clerk and recorders to make sure legal notices are correct. When I see a typo or questionable fact in a legal notice, I call the agency. That's a benefit of having an "outside" set of eyes look at legal notices before they are published and a service newspapers provide to government agencies.

When I see information in a legal notice that is particularly important to my subscribers, I write an independent story on the topic or highlight a meeting notice in another section of our paper (for free).

The Acantha is where people in Teton County look for legal notices. The county commissioners and planner told me not a week goes by that they are not looking up information that has been published in the Acantha.

Weekly newspapers give state and local government a big bang for their legal advertising buck. In return, we give the state and local governments permanent, archivable, searchable proof of legal notices.

Most importantly, however, we give citizens the opportunity to find legal notices as they are reading their hometown newspaper. They may be looking for high school sports stats and find themselves reading the legal notices. This is called passive readership — where readers bump into other articles and ads they weren't even looking for.

The Montana Clerk and Recorders Association met in Choteau in August, and I spoke briefly to 60-some county officials. I asked how many got up that morning and logged onto a government website to check out a new posting. Only two or three raised their hands. In today's world, citizens whose Facebook feeds and Twitter and Instagram accounts are bombarding them with notifications are already overwhelmed by a flood of data.

Please, don't add to that information overload with PD12 and PD7. Keep legal notices in newspapers, where you know they will be published in print and online and where citizens can easily find them.

Thank you.

Melody Martinsen

"Published Once a Week ~ Read Every Day"